



New Dynamics

Performance and goals

The complete performance review guide

A practical guide to preparing, running and following up employee performance reviews, with questions, examples and a downloadable checklist.

Practical guidance · Worked examples · Printable worksheet

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Read in order for the full approach, or use the linked contents to find a section. The final worksheet gives you space to record decisions and next steps.

A practical guide to preparing, running and following up employee performance reviews, with questions, examples and a downloadable checklist. This practical guide to performance reviews brings together a step-by-step approach, illustrative examples, a reusable worksheet and answers to common questions. Start with the section closest to your current challenge, then use the working session to turn the guidance into a clear next action.

What a good performance review should do

A performance review creates a shared understanding of contribution, expectations and development. Its value comes from the conversation and the decisions that follow. A completed form is a record of that work, not the outcome.

Separate the questions you are trying to answer. A development conversation asks what someone should practise next. A pay decision asks how a contribution should be rewarded. Those conversations may inform each other, but combining them without explanation can make honest reflection difficult.

Before a cycle begins, tell employees what the review will influence, who will contribute and how the final assessment will be reached.

Design the process before the form

Start with the decisions the organisation needs to make. Then choose the minimum evidence and participants needed for those decisions.

- Define the purpose: development, contribution, progression or a clearly explained combination.
- Choose a cadence that fits the work. Project reviews and quarterly check-ins can complement a formal annual summary.
- Name the accountable manager and identify other people who have observed the work.
- Set a review window with time for reflection, input, discussion and follow-up.
- Explain access to responses, retention expectations and how an employee can correct inaccurate information.

For matrix teams, write down what each reviewer is assessing. A project lead might discuss delivery and collaboration while a functional manager considers professional development. See the [multi-manager review template](#).

Gather evidence across the whole period

Ask the employee and manager to prepare separately. Both should gather examples from across the review period, including work that changed or stopped. Keep the original context alongside each example.

Use a simple evidence note: the expectation, what happened, the person's contribution, the impact and the source. A missed goal needs context too. Did the priority change? Was a dependency outside the employee's control? Was the original measure useful?

Recognition and feedback are useful inputs, but they are not a vote. Several similar comments from the same project may describe one event rather than a broad pattern. Check whether the evidence covers the scope of the role, not just its most visible moments.

Avoid using private health or family information as performance evidence. When support needs arise, follow your organisation's appropriate confidential process.

Ask questions that lead to a conversation

Use a short set of questions with room for specific examples. A long form can make people repeat themselves without adding clarity.

- Which contribution made the most difference, and what evidence helps explain it?
- Which goal changed during the period, and how did you respond?
- Where did collaboration improve the outcome?
- What was harder than expected, and what support would have helped?
- Which capability would you most like to strengthen next?
- What should your manager continue, start or stop doing?

Ask one question at a time. Where an answer is broad, ask for a concrete example before interpreting it. The [performance review template](#) turns these prompts into a reusable structure.

Run a balanced review conversation

Share the agenda and evidence in advance. Begin with the employee's view, then explore where the manager sees the work similarly or differently. Make time for disagreement without treating it as a failure of the process.

Discuss achievements and challenges using the same standard of evidence. Describe an observed behaviour and its impact instead of applying a broad label such as "not strategic". Explain what a stronger future example would look like.

If your process uses ratings, explain the definitions before the review. Calibration can test whether managers apply those definitions consistently. It should not erase relevant differences between roles or reduce the discussion to a forced distribution.

End with a concise summary: what is agreed, what needs clarification and who will resolve it. Record the employee's perspective when an interpretation remains contested.

Turn the review into a development plan

Choose one or two development priorities the person can practise in real work. For each, agree the opportunity, the support and the evidence that would demonstrate progress.

Example: An employee wants to lead more effective project handovers. They will co-lead the next handover, ask the receiving team for feedback and review what changed with their manager four weeks later. The manager will arrange an experienced colleague to help prepare.

Put the follow-up date in the calendar during the conversation. Revisit the plan in regular check-ins and adjust it when priorities change. Development should reconnect to [goals and OKRs](#) rather than becoming a separate document that nobody opens.

Use AI to prepare without outsourcing judgement

AI assistance is most useful when it helps a manager find relevant context and prepare a better discussion. A draft summary still needs review against its sources. Check whether important context is missing, whether an interpretation is justified and whether the language is fair and specific.

Do not treat generated text as evidence. Do not ask a model to infer motivation or personal characteristics from sparse notes. Ensure any tool used for employee information has been approved through your organisation's data and security review.

The manager remains responsible for the assessment and for explaining the reasoning. Employees should have a clear way to flag factual errors. Explore the [AI performance management guide](#) for a practical evaluation framework.

Check whether the process is helping

Look beyond completion rates. Ask employees whether expectations became clearer and ask managers whether the process improved the next conversation. Review whether agreed actions were followed up.

Compare participation by team only with enough context to interpret differences. A low completion rate can signal poor timing, unclear ownership or a process that does not fit the work. Fix the cause before adding reminders.

Keep the process light enough to repeat. A useful review should leave people with a clearer understanding of the past and a practical plan for what comes next.

Put the guide into practice

Set aside a working session with the people who own this process and one or two people who experience it. Use a fictional or appropriately authorised case, so the discussion can be specific without sharing unnecessary personal information. The purpose is to leave with a usable decision or document, not just agreement that the topic matters.

Prepare the case

Prepare a fictional review pack with goals, work examples, feedback and changes in priorities. Ask the reviewer to identify evidence from across the full period. Include a contribution that was useful but not highly visible. Check whether the pack separates the employee's actions from dependencies and outcomes influenced by other people.

Write the starting assumptions down before discussing solutions. If the group disagrees on what happened, identify the information needed to resolve that difference rather than building a plan on an untested story.

Work through the decision

Draft a short assessment that connects each conclusion to evidence. Remove personality labels and unsupported interpretations. Prepare questions for the employee where the record is incomplete or contradictory. The meeting should leave space for context and reflection rather than present a finished verdict that cannot be discussed.

Ask each participant to explain the proposed decision in their own words. Differences in interpretation often reveal an unclear criterion, a missing responsibility or an instruction that will be difficult to follow.

Test an exception

Introduce a manager change, extended absence or a goal that was formally revised. Decide which expectations apply to which period. If evidence is limited, state that limitation instead of inventing precision. Test how the employee can correct a factual error and how disagreement about interpretation is recorded.

Record what changes in this situation and what remains the same. An exception should lead to a clear next step, with an owner, rather than an informal workaround that nobody can explain later.

Agree the handoff

Agree development priorities, the manager's support and a follow-up date. Confirm which parts of the record are shared and who owns any subsequent decision. The review is not complete simply because a form is submitted; the actions need a clear route into the employee's ongoing work.

Finish by confirming the owner, the next action and the date when the result will be reviewed. Give the person receiving the work enough context to continue without repeating the whole discussion.

Frequently asked questions

What should a performance review cover?

Discuss agreed expectations, contributions, relevant context, feedback and development. Use examples from the full review period and account for changes in priorities or responsibilities. Give the employee room to reflect and correct facts. The exact structure depends on the organisation's purpose, but the conversation should end with clear next steps and support rather than only a retrospective score.

Should there be surprises in a review?

Important feedback is usually more useful when discussed while the employee can act on it. A formal review should bring together context from the period rather than reveal concerns that were avoidably withheld. New information can still arise, and it should be examined fairly. If a significant issue appears for the first time, allow appropriate time and process to understand it.

How can reviews be fairer across different roles?

Use role-relevant expectations, clear evidence standards and attention to opportunity and context. Do not assume identical targets create fairness when work differs. Calibrate how reviewers interpret criteria using examples, and check for missing or overly recent evidence. Give employees an understandable route to raise factual errors or concerns about the process under the organisation's approved arrangements.

Review the first cycle

Review whether the employee understood the assessment and whether both people acted on the agreed commitments. Check that development did not disappear after the form closed. Ask managers where evidence was difficult to retrieve and improve the ongoing process, while keeping records proportionate and appropriate for their purpose.

Keep a brief record of what was tried, what participants found useful and what needs to change. Compare the result with the original problem rather than judging success only by completion. If the process created extra work without improving clarity, quality or support,

simplify it and test again. Share the agreed change with the people who will use it, and name the person responsible for keeping the guidance current.

About New Dynamics

[New Dynamics](#) connects goals, feedback, recognition and reviews around the way organisations work. This guide is published by the New Dynamics Editorial Team as part of our practical library for HR leaders, managers and People teams.

Use the examples and worksheets to structure your own discussions and adapt them to your organisation. Illustrative scenarios are not customer case studies. Policy and employment guidance needs appropriate local review before adoption.

For questions about this guide, corrections or a conversation about your performance management process, email contact@new-dynamics.com. Explore the complete [guide library](#) for related resources.

Your working worksheet

Use the prompts from this guide to prepare one real conversation or decision. Keep personal or sensitive information in your organisation's approved records. This page is for your own working notes.

Purpose: What needs to improve and for whom?

Evidence: What facts and context do you need?

Decision: What will you do and why?

Support: Who needs to be involved?

Next action: Who will do what and by when?

Review: What will show that the action helped?

Discuss your next step with New Dynamics: contact@new-dynamics.com